

Open Letter

EU Commissioner for Fisheries and the Ocean, Costas Kadis

Subject: Call for a ban on bottom trawling in European marine protected areas

February 5th, 2025

Dear Commissioner Kadis,

Congratulations on your appointment as Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans. We extend our best wishes for your upcoming term and its critical objectives.

The European Union has proven time and again that it can set an example in promoting the protection of the ocean. Over the past year alone, the EU has galvanised support for a ban on deep-sea mining, led efforts to ratify the High Seas Treaty and championed protection for Antarctica. At the same, there are still major gaps that it is imperative to fill.

As you begin your tenure, we hope to work alongside you to address one of the most urgent and emblematic issues facing Europe's ocean: the continued practice of bottom trawling in marine protected areas (MPAs). The Ocean Pact represents the concrete opportunity to definitively establish the EU as a global leader in the sustainable transition of the fisheries sector, capable of aligning the protection of the ocean with a truly sustainable fishing sector.

With the upcoming UN Ocean Conference in Nice and your expected release of the EU Ocean Pact, this critical issue offers an opportunity for bold leadership to align EU policy with its global commitments and restore trust in Europe's efforts to manage, maintain and equitably share its marine ecosystems.

As members of the **"Protect Our Catch"** campaign, made up of **BLOOM**, **Blue Marine Foundation**, **Empesca't**, **Environmental Justice Foundation**, **Oceana**, **Only One**, **Seas At Risk** and **Tara Ocean Foundation**, together with small-scale fisher representatives, we would like to formally welcome you to your new role as EU Commissioner for Fisheries and the Ocean. Collectively, our organisations represent decades of work dedicated to a healthy and prosperous ocean, uniting scientific expertise, grassroots advocacy for sustainable fishing, and policy leadership to safeguard marine biodiversity, combat climate change, and support sustainable fishing practices. We look forward to discussing this issue with you, and presenting our work, recommendations and transition scenarios, in the hope that this can mark the launch of a public discussion on the levers at the disposal of the EU to reconcile the protection of the ocean with social justice in the fisheries sector.



We recognise the changing political landscape across Europe, with a growing emphasis on economic growth, jobs, and development. These priorities do not run contrary to a ban on bottom trawling in MPAs but in fact align directly. This destructive practice undermines the livelihoods of small-scale fishers and coastal communities, which are vital to Europe's economic and social fabric. Strictly protected areas boost fish biomass¹ by orders of magnitude, as well as leading to climate mitigation benefits. By restoring marine ecosystems and ensuring sustainable fisheries, we can support thriving coastal economies, create more equitable opportunities for small-scale fishers and secure long-term, European-based food security.

Bottom trawling wreaks havoc on marine ecosystems, devastating biodiversity and destroying vital seabed habitats, but it also contributes to greenhouse gas emissions by disturbing carbon-rich marine sediments and relying on subsidised fuel-intensive methods.

Even more problematic is that this is achieved with financial support from the European Union, through harmful subsidies to the sector that favour destructive industrial fishing over artisanal and low impact fishers. Ending bottom trawling in MPAs is not just a win for the environment—it's a win for fish, fishers and their communities, the economy, the European budget and climate.

In spite of the EU Action Plan on “Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries” published in February 2023 calling for Member States to develop national roadmaps to phase out this destructive practice by the end of 2024, substantial progress is still lacking.

Some European States, such as Sweden, as well as the United Kingdom, have already taken steps to restrict bottom trawling, showcasing the potential for decisive action. Yet, bottom trawling remains pervasive across Europe's MPAs, eroding trust in these so-called “protected” areas and jeopardising the future of EU's artisanal, sustainable fisheries, and EU's credibility as a leader in ocean conservation.

We urge the European Commission to take swift and meaningful action to address this issue. Bottom trawling in MPAs is already incompatible with existing EU laws, such as the Habitats Directive, the next step is ensuring these are implemented effectively. The Ocean Pact should ensure that these measures will be implemented, by:

- + Fully implementing the Marine Action Plan (“EU Action Plan on ‘Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries’ published in February 2023) in all its dimensions, and in particular the phasing out of bottom trawling in marine protected areas and a just transition to low impact fisheries.
- + Enforcing the habitats directive² to ensure MPAs are truly protected, free from destructive practices such as bottom trawling and hold those who breach EU laws to account.

¹ <https://scientiamarina.revistas.csic.es/index.php/scientiamarina/article/view/5526>

² The 1992 Habitats Directive establishes a protection framework for both marine and terrestrial biodiversity in Europe, and creates a network of protected areas, known as Natura 2000, which Member States have to manage effectively in order to achieve specific conservation objectives



With public support for stronger marine protection growing across Europe, polls indicate 90% believe MPAs are essential for preserving marine biodiversity and 73% would support a ban on bottom trawling within protected areas³. By taking decisive steps to ban bottom trawling in MPAs, the European Commission can demonstrate its commitment to marine conservation, biodiversity, and the livelihoods of coastal communities.

We are confident in your leadership and the EU's ability to seize this moment to make lasting progress for the health of our ocean and the people who rely on it, and look forward to continuing to work with you on this vital task.

Yours sincerely,



³<https://seas-at-risk.org/press-releases/most-eu-citizens-want-political-leaders-to-prioritise-ocean-protection-and-to-ban-bottom-trawling-in-marine-protected-areas-new-polls-reveal/>